



January 11, 2006

TO: State Homeland Security Working Group
State and Local Officials
County Emergency Management Directors
Area Development District Executive Directors

FROM: Thomas H. Arnold
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RE: 10-Code Guidance from the NIMS Integration Center

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a comprehensive national framework for incident management that improves the nation's ability to prepare for and respond to disasters and terrorist incidents *by establishing standard incident management processes, protocols, terminology and procedures.*

NIMS will enable responders at all levels to work together more effectively and efficiently to manage domestic incidents no matter what the cause, size or complexity. Implementation of and compliance with the NIMS is critical to ensuring full and robust preparedness across our nation.

In accordance with Homeland Security Presidential Directive -5 (HSPD-5), all federal, state and local governments must adopt the NIMS and thus they must adopt the Incident Command System (ICS); institutionalizing the use of ICS is a requirement for NIMS compliance. This is a multi-year implementation process. The intent of HSPD-5, which ordered the development of the NIMS, is clear: "The objective of the United States Government is to ensure that all levels of government across the Nation have the capability to work efficiently and effectively together, using a [single, comprehensive] national approach to domestic incident management."

A primary aspect of NIMS implementation is the use of standard or common terminology within the ICS. *The use of common language - plain English - is critical and essential to ensuring efficient, clear communication.* At this time there is not a glossary of terminology that is recommended for plain language radio communications.

The NIMS states, "Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. This integrated approach links the operational and support units of the various agencies involved and is necessary to maintain communications connectivity and discipline and enable common situational awareness and interaction."

The NIMS Integration Center has received a number of questions recently asking if organizations must use NIMS concepts and principles in day-to-day emergency operations versus only during major incidents involving mutual aid or federal participation. **The requirement to adopt and implement NIMS and ICS means using NIMS and ICS for incident management every day. Those who do not are not NIMS compliant.** It is not consistent with the NIMS to have multiple systems in place, so for everyday internal agency communications the same system that would be implemented in a multi agency ICS situation should be used.

The NIMS Integration Center sees the use of plain language in emergency response situations as matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident. The plain language requirement is about the ability of area commanders, state and local EOC personnel, federal operational coordinators, and responders, no matter the jurisdiction(s) to communicate clearly with each other and effectively coordinate response activities, no matter what the size, scope or complexity of the incident. Everyone has to speak the same language – plain English. For example, in many jurisdictions today, the law enforcement 10-codes commonly used for decades around the country sometimes differ from the 10-codes used in neighboring jurisdictions. Plain language will solve that possibly confusing and life-threatening predicament.

It is critical that all local responders, as well as those coming into the impacted area from other jurisdictions and other states, know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies and procedures. Plain language in communications is necessary to support mutual aid and the infusion of new responders coming to an event so they will be able to communicate with one another. This is what NIMS and ICS are all about. There are larger matters at stake here - achieving interoperability across jurisdictions and disciplines.

All exercises and every day activities that responders participate in will feature plain language commands. Responders will “practice like they play.” Field manuals and training will also be revised to reflect the plain language standard. This will ensure a move toward interoperability and ensure the safety of the first responders.

The point is that all responders at all levels use the same organizational structures, terminology, procedures and systems all the time. The idea is to achieve interoperability among jurisdictions and disciplines. Those who do not train for, exercise and use NIMS and ICS in their day-to-day operations will not be able to integrate their activities into a system they do not know, have not practiced and do not use, and subsequently will not be NIMS compliant.

To underscore the importance of the nationwide adoption of NIMS, the Department of Homeland Security has directed that all federal preparedness assistance to states and local jurisdictions be tied to compliance with the requirements of NIMS. Beginning Oct. 1, 2005, all recipients of federal preparedness funds must adopt and use NIMS as a condition for the receipt of FY06 preparedness assistance funding. This does not just include funds from the Department of Homeland Security; it includes preparedness funds from all federal departments and agencies, although there is no linkage between post disaster assistance funds and NIMS compliance. Specific preparedness grants will outline the requirements for eligibility in the grant language.

A preliminary list of affected federal preparedness grant programs is listed on the NIMS Integration Center's website at <http://www.fema.gov/nims> . The NIMS Integration Center has made this preliminary list available to help state and local entities identify funding streams that may be affected in connection with NIMS implementation requirements. The listing should not

be considered a definitive list of federal preparedness grants and agreements. For more information about federal assistance programs for state, local and tribal governments, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance may be found at <http://www.cfda.gov> . For more information about DHS Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) grants see <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp> .

Although the use of plain language is a requirement for FY06 compliance with NIMS, the NIMS Integration Center understands that the use of 10-codes is not going to be completely eliminated by October 2006. FEMA's goal is that good faith efforts are under way at all levels nationwide to move to plain language for all emergency operations. At the end of FY06, the states will certify to FEMA that "taken as a whole" they and their local jurisdictions are NIMS compliant. Local jurisdictions will be working with their states to achieve compliance.

NIMS implementation is a long-term effort and won't end in 2006. NIMS compliance requirements are not going to go away in 2007 or 2008 either. Continued resistance to comply with NIMS and using plain language will result in the loss of preparedness funding from federal departments and agencies. Compliance will demonstrate to the federal government a jurisdiction's eligibility for future federal funding. However, the intention of the NIMS Integration Center is to take a practical common sense approach to compliance, and a jurisdiction's funding will not be cut off because of a first responder who may still use a 10-code periodically.

The FY 2006 requirements guidance-which will be released shortly-will address this issue specifically. The notion of plain language communication is a key element of NIMS and ICS. The ability to communicate within ICS is absolutely critical. **ICS requires the use of plain English.** Our guidance is designed to outline specific actions that states and locals need to take to implement the NIMS.

For additional information on NIMS, ICS, and plain language, please visit our website, <http://www.fema.gov/nims> . If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

NIMS Integration Center

